D · GLOBAL CRISIS

To Gobineau the ills of France were merely symptomatic of a much wider crisis which faced the Western world and which involved apprehensive perusal of the continents beyond. It will be recalled that the conclusion of the Essay *indicated that already by the 1850s he was filled with gloom and foreboding at the fate of civilization. In the 1870s his proposal for a second edition of the* Essay *seemed to provide an admirable opportunity for some revision of its ideas in the light of intervening study and experience. There are many indications that Gobineau prepared a considerably enlarged version, though no copy of this and only very few of the relevant notes remain. Eventually, after having difficulty in finding a publisher for a new edition, he resigned himself to changing nothing. In 1882, the last year of his life, he did, however, write a new Foreword which appeared at the head of the second edition when it finally came out in 1884. It indicates just how little in the way of change of real substance a fuller second edition might have been expected to reveal. It would probably have exhibited still more of the inflexible dogmatism and blind immunity to criticism shown by the Foreword. And no doubt it would have added others besides Darwin and Buckle to the ranks of the alleged plagiarists.*

We include an abridgement from it here, rather than in company with the main selections from the Essay, *because it so strongly implies Gobineau's continued belief in the reality of that global crisis predicted nearly thirty years before. Our final selection, part of the article* Ce qui se fait en Asie, *which was composed in 1880–81 and was published first in a German version by Richard Wagner in his* Bayreuther Blätter *for May 1881, shows that*

Gobineau was prepared to be really flexible in one direction alone – towards recognizing that in the Essay *he had much underestimated the speed of decay. We have here a paranoiac's concern with the Yellow Peril at the gates of civilization. India, Australia and America alike tremble with fear. As for Europe, she is sunk in Latin corruption and her Slavonic peoples, carrying on their ancient role as racial intermediaries, are again leaving her vulnerable to the ethnic influence of the hordes from the East. In these pages the dying Gobineau leaves us his legacy – the prophecy of racial doom and global crisis.*

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION OF THE ESSAY ON THE INEQUALITY OF THE HUMAN RACES (1882)

THIS book was first published in 1853 (vols I and II); the last two volumes (vols III and IV) appeared in 1855. The present edition has not altered a single line of the original book. In the interval much research has indeed illuminated many matters of detail, but nothing has shaken any of the essential truths which I set forth, and I have thought it necessary to maintain the truth such as I found it. People used to think very little about ethnic problems. It was vaguely thought that investigation into these matters was needed if the still unperceived basis of history was to be brought to light. People vaguely suspected that somewhere beneath this uninvestigated body of ideas and dark mysteries must lie the vast substructures on which there have gradually arisen foundations and walls, in short every social development of the multitudes which, when viewed generally, make up the variegated pattern of humanity. But no conclusions were drawn from these initial thoughts.

Since the second half of the last century, however, the study of human history has led people to claim to be able to reduce to general laws the different phenomena whose successive developments history has shown them. This new method of classifying, explaining, praising and condemning everything by means of rigorous abstract formulae led one to suspect, beneath the superficiality of events, a

force whose precise nature had still not been discovered. The prosperity or misfortunes, the greatness or decadence of a nation had for a long time been attributed to vices or virtues manifesting themselves in the particular area under discussion. An honest nation must necessarily be a great nation and, conversely, a society whose morality became too lax was led inexorably to ruin, like Susa, Athens and Rome, just as an analogous situation had led to the ultimate ruin of the discredited cities of the Dead Sea.

People thought that these keys had opened the doors of every mystery; but in fact all remained hidden. Virtues useful to great nations must be characterized by some kind of collective egoism which prevents them from being similar to so-called virtue in private individuals. The Spartan bandit and the Roman usurer were highly efficient public personalities, although morally both Lysander and Cato were very wicked people. On reflection people had to recognize this and consequently, if one praised virtue in one nation and indignantly denounced vice in another, one was obliged to admit that this was not a question of merits or demerits in the context of Christian moral conscience, but of certain aptitudes, certain vital capacities of the soul and even of the body, which determined or paralysed the development of national life. This led people to ask themselves why one nation had greater capacities than another, and thus people found they had to recognize that these differences sprang from the factor of race.

For some time people were happy with this discovery without being able to provide a more precise explanation. 'Race' was a hollow word, and no age has so contented itself with hollow phrases, or has had such a taste for them, as the present one. The kind of translucid obscurity which usually surrounds unexplained words was here projected by physiological studies. People thought that this was

sufficient, or rather, they were at least prepared to be satisfied with this state of affairs for some time to come. Moreover, they were a little afraid of what was bound to follow. It was felt that if the intrinsic worth of a nation springs from its origins, it was necessary to limit or perhaps altogether dispense with the whole notion of equality; furthermore, a great or wretched nation could no longer be praised or blamed. It would be like the relative value of gold and copper. People recoiled before such ideas.

Must it be admitted, in these days of naïve enthusiasm for equality, that such an undemocratic hierarchy could exist among men? How many dogmas, philosophical as well as religious, declared themselves ready to contest these new ideas!

During these hesitations progress was still being made, however; increasing discoveries demanded that people should recognize the truth. Geography described what it saw spread out before it; journals overflowed with new human types; ancient history was studied in greater detail; the secrets of Asia were illuminated; the American traditions became far more accessible than ever before – in short, everything indicated the importance of race. People had to resolve to examine the question on its merits ...

I then wrote the book of which this is the second edition. Since its appearance it has been widely discussed. The underlying principles were contested less than their application and, especially, their consequences. The supporters of limitless progress did not look favourably on my book. The scholar Ewald pronounced that it was of extreme Catholic inspiration; the positivist school declared it to be dangerous. But writers who are neither Catholics nor positivists but who enjoy considerable reputations have, without admitting it, surreptitiously incorporated into their work the main principles of my book and even whole

extracts from it. In short, Fallmereyer was not mistaken when he said that it was used more often and more extensively than people cared to admit.

One of the fundamental ideas behind the book is the great influence exercised by ethnic intermixture, that is, the intermingling of different races. It was the first time that this had been observed; and never before had anyone, in underlining the social consequences of this intermingling, proposed the axiom that ethnic intermixture and the human varieties produced by it were so important that they directly determined the development and decline of societies. The theory of natural selection, which Darwin and his pupils have made so famous, was based on this proposition. The system of Buckle (among others) also sprang from it; and the great difference between Buckle's ideas and my own illustrates the divergent routes taken by two opposing systems of thought which started from the same point. Death cut short Buckle's work, but the democratic flavour of his ideas has already assured him of a success which neither the rigour of his thinking nor the breadth of his knowledge justifies.

Darwin and Buckle were thus responsible for the main offshoots from my initial ideas. Many others have simply copied out extracts from my work and presented them as truths which *they* have discovered, while also indiscriminately intermingling with them the most fashionable of contemporary ideas.

I have thus made absolutely no alterations to the first edition. It is the exposition of a system, the expression of a truth which is as clear and certain to me now as it was when I first propounded it. Developments in the study of history have in no way made me change or modify my opinions. My convictions have remained totally unchanged from the beginning. Nor has the increase in

factual knowledge done anything to weaken them – I am quite happy that more factual details have come to light, for they have done nothing to change my initial observations. The testimony of experience has, to my mind, even further demonstrated the reality of racial inequality.

I admit that I might have been tempted to join in the many protests against Darwinism. Fortunately I have not forgotten that my book is not a polemical work. Its aim is to put forward an essential truth and not to point out the errors of other people – I must thus resist the temptation to be polemical. This is why I shall refrain from attacking the supposed extension of learning which, under the name of prehistoric studies, is happy simply to have created a great fuss. Exemption from knowing and above all from examining each nation's oldest documents seems the rule with these so-called investigations. It is one way to dispense with all information. There is then a complete void. People thus think they are perfectly free to fill this supposed void with whatever hypotheses suit them and can be placed in it. Then everything can be automatically controlled – by means of a special phraseology, by dividing history into Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, and substituting geological vagueness for relatively reliable chronological approximations, these 'prehistoric' researchers manage to stimulate themselves into a state of such intense excitement that they can imagine or believe anything ...

These fantasies will die a natural death. We can see this already. Ethnology needs to have its fling before becoming completely serious. There was a time quite recently when prejudice against consanguineous marriages became such that there was talk of ratifying it by law. It was thought that to marry a near cousin meant afflicting all one's children in advance with deafness and other hereditary diseases. No one seemed to realize that past generations,

while having many consanguineous marriages, never experienced the morbid consequences which are supposed to result from them. The Seleucids, Ptolemies and Incas married their sisters, but all enjoyed very good health and keen intelligence, while also being exceptionally handsome. Such conclusive and irrefutable facts, however, could convince no one, for people were wholly influenced by the fancies of a liberalism which, not liking parochial exclusiveness, was opposed to any notion of racial purity. People wanted to celebrate the union of Negro and white man as much as possible – hence the mulatto. What had to be shown to be dangerous and inadmissible was a race which only perpetuated itself through the union of its own members. After so much nonsensical talk the entirely conclusive experiments of Dr Broca destroyed this paradox for ever; and similar phantasmagoria will eventually meet the same end.

Let me again say that I have left these pages just as I wrote them when the doctrine they contain sprang from my mind, like a bird which puts its head out of the nest and looks which way to go in the limitless spaces before it. My theory stood on its own, with its weaknesses and strength, its validity and its share of mistakes, like all man's intuitive insights. It took wing and still flies on. I shall not attempt either to shorten or lengthen its wings, and even less to adjust its flight. Who could prove to me that I could direct it better today and, above all, that I would reach nearer to the truth? What I then thought to be true I still do, and consequently I have no reason to change anything. This book forms the basis of all that I have done and of all that I shall do in the future.